

Rhode Island School
of Design / STEAM

Discovery Through Juxtaposition



Nature Lab



How do the ways we juxtapose, categorize,
and classify objects reveal different
meanings, systems of thought, and
new perceptions?

Introduction

The way we choose to group and categorize objects can reveal how we process information and create meaning. Prior knowledge, context, memories, and our particular interests all influence the types of information we are each able or not able to see. By looking at the similarities and differences between objects either found in nature or fabricated, we can reveal information that adds nuance and complexity to our understanding and exercises our abilities of perception. Careful study of an object out of its original context can reveal previously unnoticed details of form and function.

Guiding Questions

- What can you learn about an object by putting it in relationship to something else?
- How can taxonomies or categories be informative? How can they be limiting?
- What is implied by putting objects into systems of classification?
- How do we derive meaning from visual evidence?
- How does an artist organize and reveal information within a work of art?
- What does a work of art tell you about the artist's relationship with the natural world?

In Part One, students will group and regroup natural specimens thematically. In Part Two, they will do the same with works of art. The goal is to help students recognize how information is revealed through the relationships and systems that underlie the natural sciences and the art world. They will articulate their reasons for grouping different works of art together with a written curatorial statement.

To encourage new insights at all levels, consider asking an art teacher and a science teacher to co-facilitate this lesson.

Suggested Time

The timeframe can be adjusted depending on the needs of the classroom and the variations you incorporate. At a minimum, 45 minutes should be given to the specimen-sorting activity and another 45 minutes to the art-sorting activity.

Key Words

Taxonomy, discipline, inquiry, system, visual elements, conceptual elements, context, observation

PART TWO

Students can stay in the same groups that they were in for Part One or be divided into new groups. Each group is given at least six to eight images of works from the RISD Museum collections (a set of 45 is included). Depending on the size of the groups, several copies of each image may be printed and distributed.

1. Ask students to observe each image, make connections across their set of images, and consider ways they can organize the set. One student in each group should act as note-taker, recording connections or broad categories that are established as the artworks in the images are discussed by the group. Prompt students to discuss these questions:

- What do you notice about each artwork?
- What is the primary subject?
- What occupies most of the space? What is in the foreground? What is pushed to the background?
- How does the artist organize information?
- What are the similarities among the works? What are the differences?
- What questions arise as you spend time considering the set as a whole?

The following questions can be used as writing prompts for a journal entry or essay, and offer an opportunity for formative assessment.

- What methods has the artist used to communicate the key ideas?
- How does an artist organize information within a work of art?
- What type of relationship with nature does the artist communicate?

2. Have students group their images into at least two categories, then ask them to share their reasoning with the class. Students should note of when paintings could fall into two or more differing categories, as these questions can help guide the conversation:

- How did you go about making decisions? For example, did you look for commonalities in the objects and then create a category, or did a specific object serve as a catalyst to understanding other objects?
- How did you use your categories to organize the information you observed in your images?

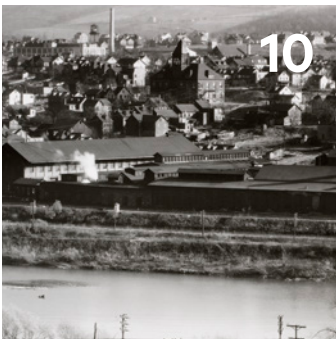
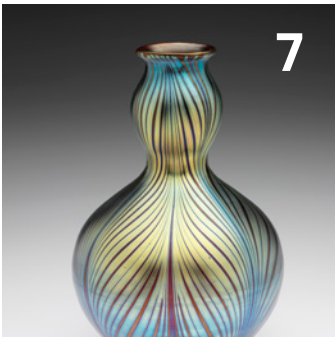
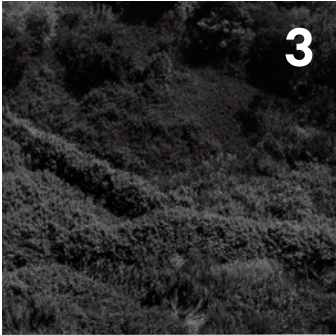
The following question can be used as a writing prompt for a journal entry or essay, and offers an opportunity for formative assessment.

- What role did your prior knowledge and experience play in developing the categories?

3. Ask students, working individually or in small groups, to select a key theme that emerged during their discussion and organization, then to use this big idea to curate a hypothetical exhibition.

Students should begin organizing their exhibition by sequencing the chosen works of art in an order that best communicates their big idea. Next, have them write an introductory curatorial statement to explain their exhibition and what the works of art reveal. Finally, ask them to generate a list of questions they would ask visitors who attended their exhibition.

Discovery Through Juxtaposition

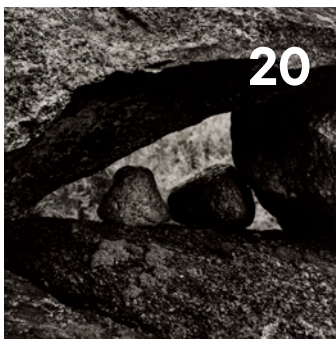


PART ONE

1. **Organic and inorganic objects chosen from multiple biological and geological groups from RISD's Nature Lab**

PART TWO

2. **Unknown artist, Indian, India**
Rigid fan, 19th Century
Peacock feathers, mirror, wood stick
Height: 50.8 cm (20 inches)
Museum Collection 1989.044.8
3. **Joe Deal, American, 1947–2010**
Newport Beach, California, The Fault Zone, 1981, 1979
Gold-toned gelatin silver print
Image: 28.6 x 28.6 cm (11 1/4 x 11 1/4 inches)
Museum Purchase: Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund and Gift of James D. and Diane D. Burke 2003.76.4
4. **Shunkei, Japanese, fl. ca. 1800–1820**
Praying mantis and fly on vine, Things creeping under hand, 1820
Polychrome wood block print
Sheet: 21.1 x 28.7 cm (8 5/16 x 11 5/16 inches)
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.597
5. **Childe Hassam, American, 1859–1935**
Diamond Cove, Appledore, 1907
Graphite, pastel, and black chalk on wove paper
18.1 x 23.8 cm (7 1/8 x 9 3/8 inches)
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 21.119
6. **Adolphe Braun, French, 1812–1877**
Fruit Tree Blossoms, from Fleurs Photographiées series (Photographs of Flowers), ca. 1854
Albumen print from glass negative
Plate: 44.5 x 51.1 cm (17 1/2 x 20 1/8 inches)
Mary B. Jackson Fund 1997.20
7. **Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company, manufacturer, American, active 1892–1932**
Louis Comfort Tiffany, designer, American, 1848–1933
Vase, 1902
Glass
Height: 21.6 cm (8 1/2 inches)
Gift of Mrs. Margaret I. Buffington 83.068
8. **Attributed to Payag, Indian**
Shah Shuja Hunting Nilgai, ca. 1650–1655
Opaque watercolor and gold on paper
Height: 39.4 cm (15 1/2 inches)
Museum Works of Art Fund 58.068
9. **Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797–1858**
Parrot on Pine Branch (Matsu ni inko), 1840's
Polychrome wood block print
Image: 16.4 x 11.1 cm (6 7/16 x 4 3/8 inches)
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.043
10. **Walker Evans, American, 1903–1975**
Jim Dow, printer, American, b. 1942
View of Easton, Pennsylvania, American Photographs II, 1936
Gelatin silver print
Image/sheet: 20.3 x 25.4 cm (8 x 10 inches)
Gift of James Dow 71.043.40
11. **Oliver Gagliani, American, 1917–2002**
Untitled, 1966
Gelatin silver print
Image/sheet: 19.7 x 19.7 cm (7 3/4 x 7 3/4 inches)
Gift of Leland Rice 2003.152.2
12. **Unknown artist, Turkish**
Iznik Dish with Floral Design, around 1550–1575
Fritware with polychrome underglaze
Height: 6.2 cm (2 7/16 inches)
Gift of Miss Theodora Lyman 19.271



13. **Edward Weston, American, 1886–1958**
printer Cole Weston, 1919–2003
Cliff with Seagull, Point Lobos, 1946
Gelatin silver print
Museum Works of Art Fund 71.117.5
14. **William H. Bell, American, 1830–1910**
Perched Rock, Rocker Creek, Arizona, Explorations and Surveys West of the 100th Meridian, 1872
Albumen print
Image: 27.5 x 20.3 cm (10 13/16 x 8 inches)
Jesse Metcalf Fund 77.023
15. **Unknown artist, Greek, Attica**
Miniature Oil Flask (Lekythos), late 5th century BCE
Terracotta, red-figure
Anonymous gift 55.049
16. **Pieter Withoos, Dutch, 1654–1693**
Study of Four Butterflies and a Bumblebee, late 17th Century
Watercolor and gouache over graphite on vellum
30 x 21.9 cm (11 13/16 x 8 5/8 inches)
Ernest and Pearl Nathan Fund 82.025
17. **Arnold Print Works, American, 1861–1942**
Textile swatch, 1900
Printed silk
12.1 x 19.7 cm (4 3/4 x 7 3/4 inches)
Gift of Jacob Ziskind, the Crescent Corporation 49.369.30.5
18. **Mary Ann Willson, American, active 1818–1829**
Pelican with Young, ca. 1800–1830
Ink and watercolor with stenciling on paper
32.7 x 40.8 cm (12 7/8 x 16 1/16 inches)
Jesse Metcalf Fund 44.092
19. **Unknown artist, Chinese**
Pair of Plates with Scenes from the Gengzhitu, 1662–1722
Porcelain with glaze and enamel
Bequest of John M. Crawford, Jr. 1989.110.58.1
20. **Aaron Siskind, American, 1903–1991**
Martha's Vineyard 114B, 1954
Gelatin silver print
Gift of Mr. Robert B. Menschel 77.145.21
21. **Edward Lear, English, 1812–1888**
Palaeocastritza, Corfu, dated 21 April 1862
Watercolor, pen and ink, and graphite on wove paper
23.5 x 32.1 cm (9 1/4 x 12 5/8 inches)
Anonymous Gift 70.118.32
22. **Unknown artist, Chinese**
Jade Landscape, late 18th century
Jade
Bequest of John M. Crawford, Jr. 1989.110.43
23. **Unknown artist, Portuguese; Spanish, Andalusia**
Textile Length, ca. 1800
Silk satin compound weave
76.2 x 53.3 cm (30 x 21 inches)
Museum Collection S50.155



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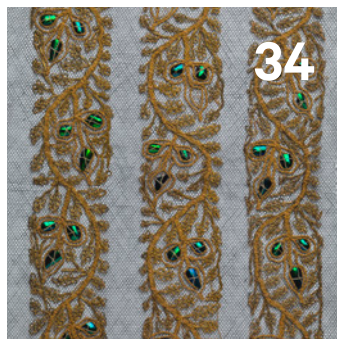
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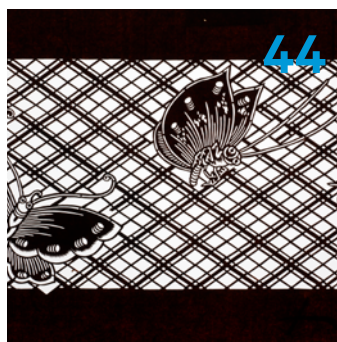
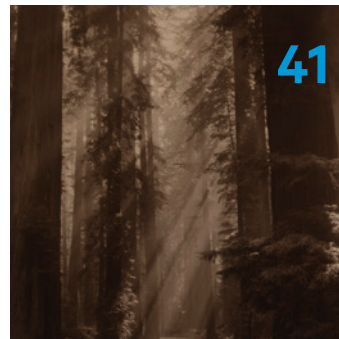
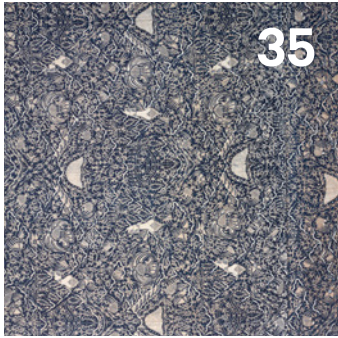


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24. **Kichizō Tsutaya, publisher, Japanese**
Keisai Eisen, Japanese, 1790–1848
***Owl and maple (Kaede ni mimizuku)*, 1820's**
Polychrome wood block print
Image: 22.7 x 17 cm (8 15/16 x 6 11/16 inches)
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.511
25. **John Warwick Smith, English, 1749–1831**
***The Villa of Maecenas at Tivoli*, 1776–1831**
Watercolor over graphite on laid paper with scraping
44.1 x 50.2 cm (17 3/8 x 19 3/4 inches)
Anonymous gift 69.154.12
26. **Brett Weston, American, 1911–1993**
***Pond*, 1950**
Gelatin silver print
Gift of Dan Miller 2008.112.5
27. **Sadahide, Japanese, 1807–1878 or 1879**
Iseya Soemon, publisher, Japanese
***Peonies (Botan)*, 1835**
Polychrome wood block print
Image: 23.2 x 29.4 cm (9 1/8 x 11 9/16 inches)
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.317
28. **Unknown artist, Italian, Italy; Florence**
***Double-handed drug jar (orciuolo) with oak leaves and leaping hare*, ca. 1430–1460**
Tin-glazed earthenware
23.5 x 25.4 x 20.3 cm (9 1/4 x 10 x 8 inches) (maximum)
Museum Works of Art Fund 43.351
29. **Joseph Mallord William Turner, English, 1775–1851**
***Rainbow: A View on the Rhine from Dunkholder Vinyard, of Ostersprey and Feltzen below Bosnart*, ca. 1819**
Watercolor applied with brush with scraped highlights
18.7 x 29.2 cm (7 3/8 x 11 1/2 inches)
Anonymous gift 71.153.2
30. **Unknown artist, Chinese, China**
***Double-Necked Vessel*, 17th century**
Porcelain with underglaze blue, glaze and silver
Height: 22.2 cm (8 3/4 inches)
Bequest of Susan Martin Allien 35.665
31. **Gorham Manufacturing Company, American, Providence, 1831–present**
***Tureen*, 1884**
Silver
Height: 17.8 cm (7 inches)
Gift of Mrs. Pierre Brunschwig 81.072ab
32. **Attributed to Domenichino, Italian, 1581–1641**
***Landscape with Bathers*, ca. 1600–1630**
Oil on canvas
77.2 x 132.7 cm (30 3/8 x 52 1/4 inches)
Museum Works of Art Fund 55.107
33. **Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797–1858**
***Bonito and radish (Katsuo to daikon)*, 1830's**
Polychrome woodblock print
Image: 24.9 x 11.8 cm (9 13/16 x 4 5/8 inches)
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.269C
34. **Unknown artist, Indian, India**
***Trim fragment*, 19th Century**
Cotton net with metallic-wrapped yarn embroidery and beetle wing embellishment
Length: 43.2 cm (17 inches)
Gift of Mrs. Albert H. Miller 41.016



- 35. Unknown artist, Javanese, Java; Surakarta**
Court wrapper (dodot), 1890–1910
 Cotton, indigo; batik
 Length: 320 cm (126 inches)
 Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.473
- 36. Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797–1858**
Kichizō Tsutaya, publisher, Japanese
***The sea at Satta, Suruga Province, Thirty-six views of Mount Fuji*, 1858.4**
 Polychrome wood block print
 Plate: 33.8 x 22.2 cm (13 5/16 x 8 3/4 inches) (Mat size: D)
 Gift of Marshall H. Gould 46.293.5
- 37. Salomon van Ruysdael, Dutch, ca. 1602–1670**
***The Ferry Boat*, 1645**
 Oil on canvas
 97.2 x 144.2 cm (38 1/4 x 56 3/4 inches)
 Museum Appropriation Fund 33.204
- 38. Josef Frank, designer, Austrian, 1885–1967**
Svenskt Tenn, manufacturer, Swedish, 1933
***La Plata*, 1943–1945**
 Linen; screen print
 Length: 223.5 cm (88 inches)
 Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund 2008.9.1
- 39. Unknown artist, Japanese**
Noh theater costume (karaori), 18th Century
 Ikat-dyed silk compound weave with supplementary continuous gold-leaf paper patterning wefts and supplementary discontinuous silk patterning weft floats
 Center back length: 144.8 cm (57 inches)
 Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.481
- 40. Shunkei, Japanese, fl. ca. 1800–1820**
***Snail, caterpillar and insects, Things creeping under hand*, 1820**
 Polychrome wood block print
 Sheet: 21 x 28.7 cm (8 1/4 x 11 5/16 inches)
 Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.605
- 41. Possibly Julius T. Boysen, American, 1869–1939**
***Untitled*, ca. 1903**
 Gelatin silver print
 Image/sheet: 99.1 x 73.7 cm (39 x 29 inches)
 Gift of Mr. F. Steele Blackall III 82.064.4
- 42. Abraham Hendricksz. van Beyeren**
Dutch, ca. 1620–1690
***Still Life of Fish*, ca. 1655**
 Oil on canvas
 97.2 x 84.8 x 9.5 cm (38 1/4 x 33 3/8 x 3 3/4 inches)
 Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund and gift of Group 104 64.035
- 43. Gorham Manufacturing Company, manufacturer, American, Providence, 1831–present**
William Christmas Codman, designer, English, 1839–1921
Joseph Edward Straker, silversmith, English, 1843–1912
Franz Ziegler, modeler, German, 1869–1934
Potter and Company, cabinetmaker, American, fl. 1878–1910
***Lady's Writing Table and Chair, Lady's writing table and chair*, 1903**
 Ebony, mahogany, boxwood, redwood, thuya wood, ivory, mother-of-pearl, silver, mirrored glass, and gilded tooled leather
 127 x 127 x 71.1 cm (50 x 50 x 28 inches)
 Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick B. Thurber 58.095
- 44. Unknown artist, Japanese**
Stencil (katagami), 19th century
 Mulberry paper (kozo); persimmon stain, thrust cut (tsukibori), chisel cut (ichimaizuki), punch cut (dogubori)
 25.4 x 40.6 cm (10 x 16 inches)
 Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 05.111
- 45. Anna Atkins, English, 1799–1871**
***Lastroea Foeniseii*, ca. 1854**
 Cyanotype
 33.3 x 22.9 cm (13 1/8 x 9 inches)
 Museum purchase 1986.155











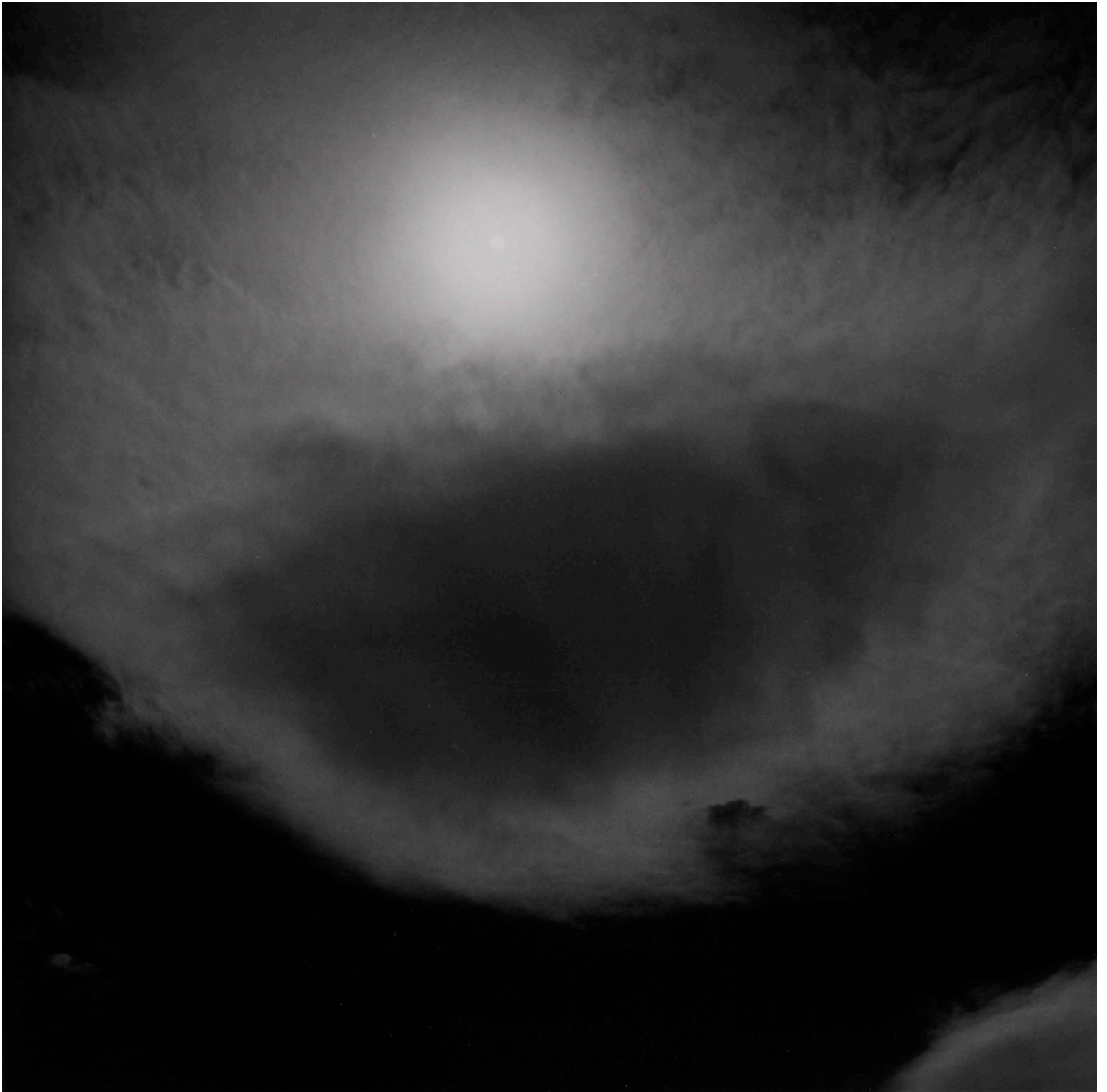




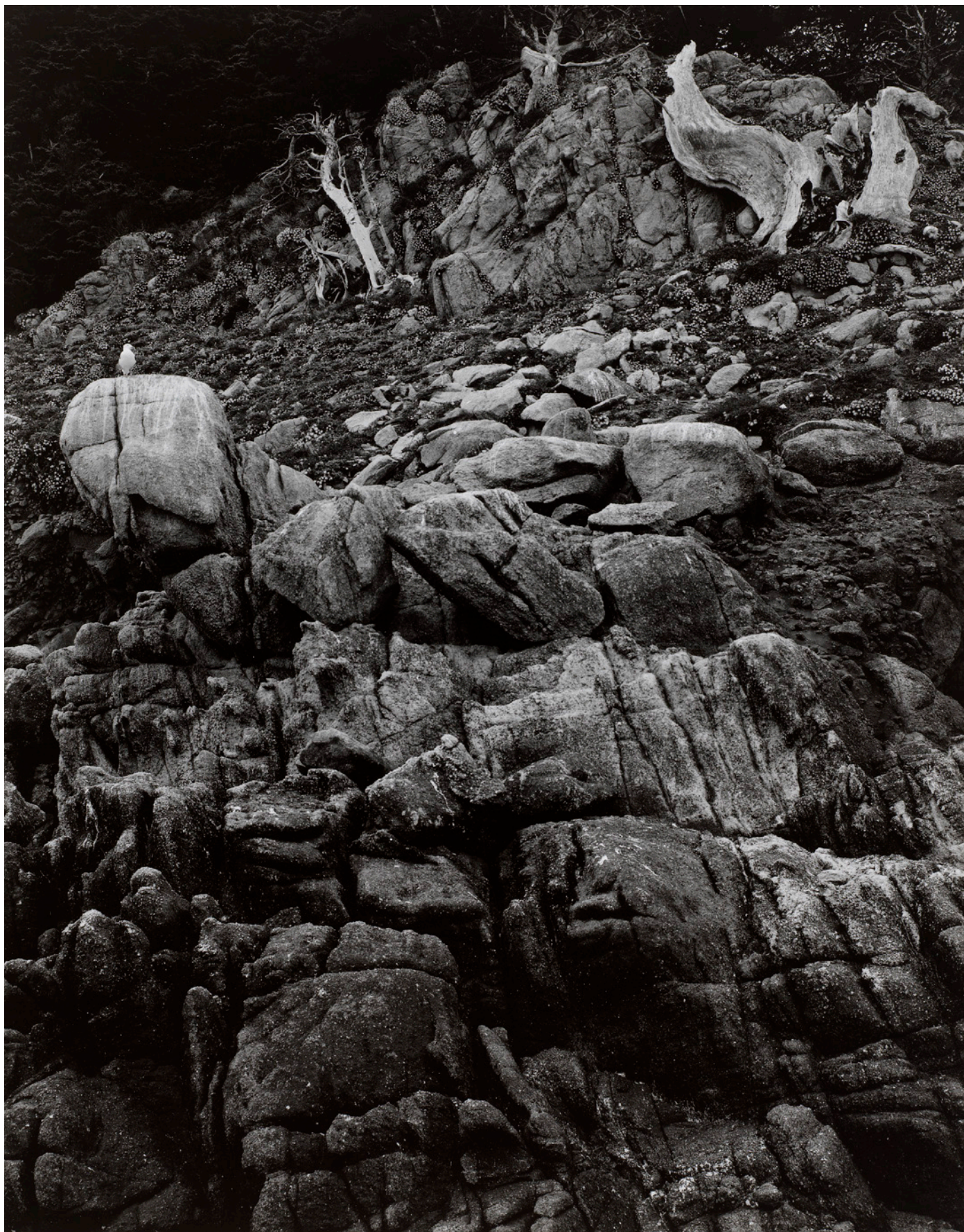


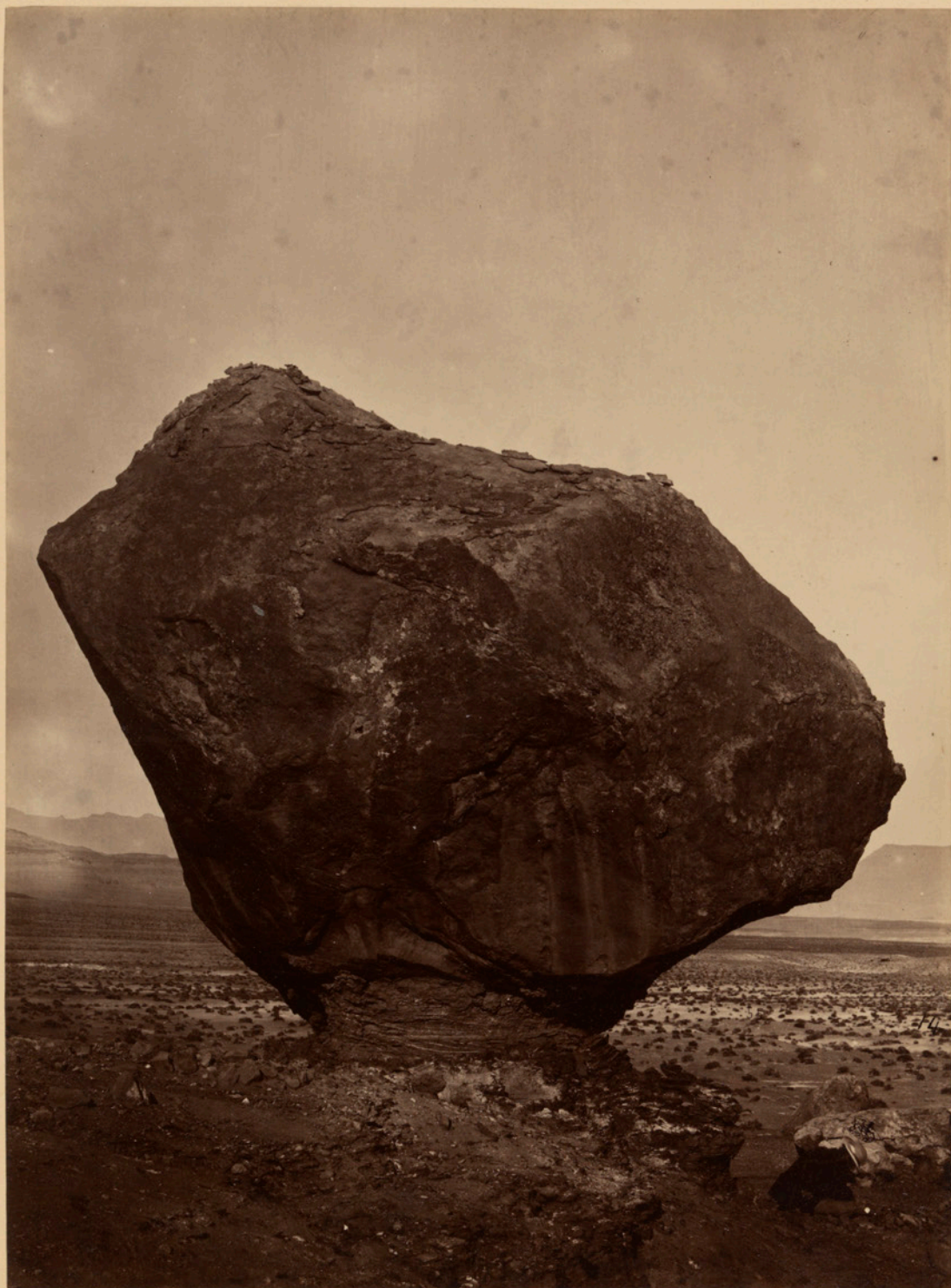












W. Bell, Phot.

Nº 14.

PERCHED ROCK, ROCKER CREEK, ARIZONA.



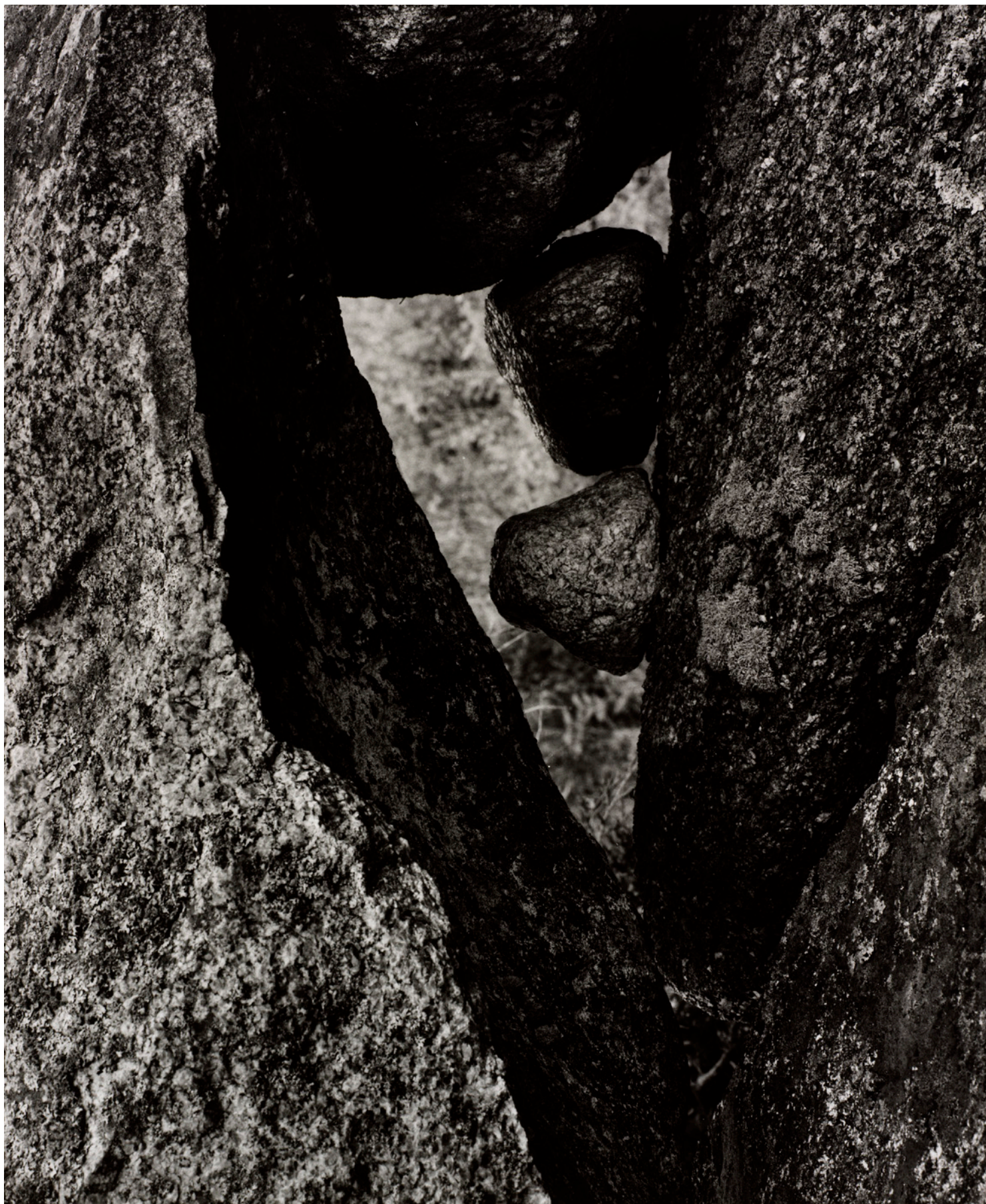


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Rhode Island School of Design / STEAM was developed collaboratively with Tracie Costantino, associate dean of faculty; Neal Overstrom, director, Nature Lab; Sarah Ganz Blythe, deputy director of exhibitions, education and programming, RISD Museum; Mariani Lefas-Tetenes, educator for school and teacher programs, RISD Museum; Melita Morales, EPSCoR | STEAM communications and engagement coordinator, Nature Lab; and Rachel Atlas, collections specialist, Nature Lab.

Support for the Nature Lab is provided by the National Science Foundation. RISD Museum educational programming for K–12 schools students and teachers is made possible by Charles and Pamela Meyers, the John Bickford Foundation, the Rhode Island State Council for the Arts, the RISD Museum docents, and the RISD Museum associates.

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